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ABSTRACT

White slavery is a slang term which denotes the holding of a person, usually a female, against her will for the purpose of prostitution. A lack of information about the crime exists, partly because of the global nature of the crime. The little public information available shows that historically, prostitution centers were located in New Orleans, New York, and Chicago. Today legal brothels in Nevada as well as street walkers in other states operate in much the same way as they did in the past. Current international white slave procurers recruit prostitutes from other countries by using cover occupations for legal entry, or by using the subterfuge of promise of a legitimate job and then forcing the women into prostitution after entry. Generally, the developed countries are the prostitution markets; the underdeveloped countries are recruitment areas. No international court exists to control slavery of any form. The White Slave Traffic Act of 1910 (Mann Act) was supposed to eliminate white slavery in the United States but has been ineffective. State and local regulations have focused on the prostitutes, not on the managers. The lack of women's rights in many parts of the world, the profit to be made from white slavery, and the lack of information are all obstacles to the solution of the white slavery problem. (ABL)

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A Comparative Analysis of White Slavery in the Modern World

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Richard N. Holden

White Slavery is a slang term which denotes the holding of a person, usually a female, against her will for the purpose of prostitution or other illegal activity of a sexual nature (De Sola, 1982:164). While the subject of white slavery has been popular in works of fiction, it has received little or no attention from academecians or those involved in law enforcement. This is in spite of the fact that both governmental and non-governmental groups, involved in human rights issues, have recognized that the exploitation of prostitution has been an international problem for at least a century (Karunatilleke, 1981:1).

Part of the reason for the lack of information rests with the global nature of the crime. There are few agencies which trace international criminals on a continual basis. The one agency which has been responsible for providing intelligence information to various law enforcement agencies about white slave operations is the International Criminal Police Organization, INTERPOL. This organization, however, specializes in intelligence gathering rather than enforcement action. For that reason they are reluctant to share their information with the public. This position is understandable given the need for discretion when exchanging sensitive information between a variety of nations.

The systematic study of white slavery would require

substantial resources and freedom to move from country to country gathering data. Few, outside of law enforcement or international research teams, have access to this level of funding. Absent the resources that would allow such a venture, this paper will focus upon what little information is currently available to the public. While this is an obvious limitation, this paper represents a modest beginning in the study of a crime that has been relatively ignored in the past.

Historical Development

The term, "White Slavery", was coined in the 1890's by a Chicago reporter. A young girl tossed a note from a room on the top floor of a Chicago building stating that she was being held a slave (Sifakis,1982:76). The investigation of this matter revealed an extensive prostitution operation managed by Mary Hastings, an ex-prostitute from Brussels who had worked her way to Chicago through Paris, Toronto, British Columbia, San Francisco, Portland and Denver. She began the Chicago operation at the age of twenty-five and had a team of kidnappers covering the midwest in search of suitable young ladies, between the age of 13 and 17, who might be marketable as prostitutes. The girls would be brought to the Chicago establishment where a group of professional rapists would introduce them to the business. That this establishment survived as long as it did is attributable to the willingness of the Chicago Police to ignore the situation, for a reasonable compensation which Mary gladly provided.

Of course, not all of Mary Hasting's girls were kidnapped.

Some came after being promised a good paying job by Mary, only to be imprisoned, and others came as prostitutes of their own choice. It was the slavery issue, however, that finally drove her out of business in 1895.

The Mary Hastings case brought the public s attention to the problem of white slavery, but this was far from the first occurrence of this crime. Prostitution came to this country with the first European settlers; the practice was unheard of among the Indians. The British government, in its zeal to rid England of undesirables, transported prostitutes and other lawbreakers, to the New World by the hundreds. The major cities, such as New York and New Orleans, quickly had a number of large European style brothels. This situation existed well into the nineteenth century. As settlers moved west, prostitution followed. When the female to male ratio began to equalize, however, and organized religion grew in power, prostitution came under increased attack. Also, the steady flow of European prostitutes subsided as the Americans gained their independence. However, the demand for prostitutes was still present, and young girls of good breeding were especially desired. To maintain their customers in the face of severe competition, many of the large brothels resorted to white slavery (Sifakis,1982:587-8).

One of the most notorious white slavers at the beginning of the 19th century was Sam Purdy. This charming gentleman is credited for originating the phrase, "sold down the river". He specialized in stealing young girls along the Ohio and upper Mississippi and selling them down river to bordellos in Louisiana.

Not all of these girls were kidnapped, however, some were bought from their impoverished parents (Sifakis:594). Purdy met his end when he ran afoul of a reformer by the name of Carlos White. The Purdy gang went too far when they kidnapped two teenage sisters, Rose and Mary Beckett of St. Louis. The girls were sold as a set to the proprietor of the Swamp, a notorious New Orleans bordello, for $400. Carlos White searched every bordello in New Orleans until he found the girls; which he rescued after shooting one of their guards and pistol whipping the other. Not satisfied with merely freeing the girls, White tracked down and killed every member of the Purdy gang, including Sam (Sifakis:61,595).

By the mid 1800's, New Orleans was the procuring capital of the nation.
Young girls were enticed into the brothels where they were trained and shipped out to bordellos all over the South. Many of these girls were there by choice, but there were many who were not. The New Orleans procuresses, such as Nellie Haley and Louisa Murphy operated with impunity in the South. It was only after attempting to continue her trade in Chicago that Haley, the Queen of the Procuresses, had problems with the law.

At the same time the New Orleans rings were operating, a number of people were involved in the same type of activities in New York. The name given to the trade in this area of the country was, "grabbers". People such as Red Light Lizzie and Hester Jane Haskins managed white slave gangs that supplied girls to brothels throughout New York and the Atlantic coast. A major scandal broke out in 1875, however, when these groups started to kidnap girls

from middle and upper class families. Attractive girls of good breeding always commanded a higher price than the average prostitute. Haskins, or Jane the Grabber as she was called, was arrested and sent to prison as a result of these activities. Even the bribes paid to the police could not save her once she started stealing the wrong girls (Sifakis:292).

After the turn of the century, Chicago became a major center for the management and distribution of prostitutes. It had always been a large center for the consumption of vice, but with prohibition and the evolution of the major crime gangs, it practically became the vice capital of the world. With the police firmly in the hip pocket of organized crime, Chicago mobsters refined the procurment and pimp business to a science.

The modern situation has changed only slightly. The large, Victorian brothels are gone, but in their place are expensive suites in luxury hotels where high priced call girls continue the tradition. Legalized brothels in Nevada, massage parlors and street walkers in every major city still operate much the same as in the past. While prostitution is observed and is often the subject of research or reform movements, what is often lost is the manner in which the prostitute is recruited. It is done in much the same fashion as in earlier periods, although outright kidnapping is used less frequently.

Global Perspectives

The international traffic in people has not decreased with the progression toward the twenty-first century. If anything, the

situation may be getting worse. In the past thirty years the transportation and communications industries have gone through a technological revolution. The result has been an increase in international tourism and labor migration. As a result, entrance formalities into many countries have been relaxed, thus allowing for an even higher increase in the trans-national movement of people.

White slavers have utilized this situation to maximum benefit. Through a whole array of legal and quasi-legal maneuvering, women are exploited from one end of the globe to the other. According to Kesera Karunatilleke, in a report presented in 1981 to the 27th Congress of the International Abolitionist Federation in Nice, procurers have developed two distinct methods of operation in various parts of the world.

The first technique is known as "disguised traffic". In these cases, the women are accomplices to the crime. Prostitutes are recruited for other countries. They are then given cover occuopations, such as waitress, exotic dancer, barmaid or hostess, from which they gain legal entry into another country with a work visa. An even simpler and more straight forward approach is simply the tourist cover, which will gain temporary entrance into almost any country in the world. While this represents a problem for law enforcement, this is not really white slavery, but rather a more sophisticated form of prostitution. It may become white slavery, however, if the prostitute is held captive at the place she is sent. This frequently happens to young women and girls who are loaned expense money to get to the place they will work. They

never seem to pay off the debt, which grows with the addition of new expenses and interest.

The second technique involves the use of subtrefuge to get women into another country, at which time they are forced into prostitution. A common theme is the advertisement in newspapers and magazines for waitresses, dancers, singers and other legitimate jobs. Once the girls arrive at their destinations, however, they are immediately forced into prostitution. The techniques used to coerce the victims range from physical violence to seizing their passports so that they cannot leave.

The large number of people involved in the exploitation of prostitution on an international basis makes it difficult to get a truly accurate picture of the problem. However, a pattern appears to have developed which allows us some insight into the sources of victims, markets and routes of travel taken by practitioners of this trade. Generally speaking, the most commercially developed countries are the primary markets for prostitutes. The majority of women seem to be recruited from the under-developed nations, although this is not an absolute certainty, women may be recruited from anywhere (there is a thriving market for European girls in African and Asian countries). It should be noted, however, that women are not sent from a single location to a single specific destination, rather they may be sent to any part of the globe from a point of embarkation. It is truly an inter-continental traffic.

The primary center for disguised traffic in Europe appears to be Luxembourg. In the Far East, Hong Kong has served the same

purpose for Oriental girls. Japan has also served in this capacity for South Korean, Japanese and particularly, Thai girls. Other regional centers have been identified in Argentina and the Netherlands Antilles. In the Middle East, Lebanon appears to be the center for activities involving exploitation of prostitutes.

It also appears that Spain is sometimes used as a transit center by South American nationals while sending prostitutes from Argentina and Uruguay to distant destinations in the Middle East, the Far East and Australia. Further, it has been observed that some networks in Europe, especially in France and Switzerland, recruit for "cover jobs" in West Africa, the real purpose being to supply prostitutes for establishments in the Ivory Coast and Senegal (Karunatilleke,1981:3).

In the United States, the organizers of white slave rings seem to be following a pattern similar to that which has developed over time. The groups that seem to be most responsible for forced prostitution are the outlaw motorcycle gangs that have evolved over the past thirty years. To some extent, the recruiting techniques used in this country have a uniquely American flavor. The Hollywood, or model agent, scam has been a successful ruse for recruiting girls who wish to be actresses or models since the first motion picture was released. In this technique, the victim is offered a screen test and a promise of a movie or modeling career by a person posing as a producer or agent. Upon her arrival, however, she is forced into prostitution, pornography or both. This technique has been especially successful with girls who are extremely attractive. The recruiter plays upon their

vanity and once they are coerced into illicit sex, they are often too humiliated to return home.

A variation on the international recruitment angle, is the advertisement of various legitimate job opportunities for women in other states. While the ability to seize a woman's passport is not a weapon in these cases, the use of physical force or forced drug addiction has been sufficiently successful to maintain an adequate number of prostitutes for the criminal organization.

Perhaps the most popular, and most researched, method of procuring is the exploitation of young runaways. Pimps have developed a number of techniques for converting naive young girls into prostitutes. These approaches vary between individuals, but they range from supplying free drugs until the girl is addicted, to supplying money for living expenses until she is in debt too far to refuse, to the old stand-by, physical force.

Legal Perspectives

While there are a number of international agreements detailing the world community's attitude toward the traffic in people, enforcement actions are purely local activities. Each country, and state within the U.S., must act within its own legal system. No international court exists to control slavery of any form.

In the United States, the only legal tool at the disposal of the Federal government is the Mann Act. This law, formally known as the White Slave Traffic Act of 1910, was introduced as a result of the disclosure that a Chicago vice couple, Alphonse and

Eva Dufaur, had imported 20,000 women and girls into the United States to stock their brothels (Sifakis,1982:471). It was believed that by providing the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Justice Department with a strong federal statute, organized white slave rings would be eliminated. This did not prove to be the case, however. The first successful prosecution of this act was of Heavyweight Champion Jack Johnson who in 1912 persuaded a white prostitute, whom he later married, to accompany him to another state. He received a one year term in prison, which he eventually served in 1920.

As a tool against organized crime, the Mann Act has been a washout. It was successful in prosecuting small time operators, but against the larger organizations, such as the Capone mob, it was useless. During recent years, this law has been used occasionally. In the past five years there have been sixty convictions of various offenses under this act. While this is notable, it represents a fairly low success rate on the part of the Federal government to control white slavery.

A more successful technique has been the use of state and local regulations by local law enforcement officials. However, the focus of local law enforcement activity is usually upon the prostitute, rather than the person managing her. Thus, the prostitute is often victimized by both the gangster and the legal system.

The legal situation in other parts of the world is simular to that of the United States, although most countries have a centralized legal system. Local laws designed to regulate the

prostitution trade are the major weapons utilized by the authorities against white slavers. However, the difficulty in gathering hard evidence has hampered efforts to eliminate the trade in human beings. As with the United States, the focus upon prostitution often fails to investigate beyond the prostitute.

Progress is being made, however, due to the work of INTERPOL and groups such as the International Abolitionist Federation, who provide a continual flow of information, concerning the traffic in white slavery, to law enforcement officials in various nations. The challenge is still a large one, and it is not made any easier by the lack of knowledge available to the general public on this subject.

Conclusion

Ultimately the solution to white slavery may rest with the issue of women's rights. The traffic in women exists because of an unstated philosophy that women are primarily on earth to satisfy the pleasures of men. In a large portion of today's world, the female population is still considered little more than someone's property. At best, women in these areas are given fewer rights than males. We in the Western Democracies have been lulled into thinking that because women have been gaining equality here, the same is true around the world. Nothing could be further from the truth. Many regions are still mired in the 18th century, or worse. A sad fact is that even in the industrialized nations, the market for young girls (and boys) is sufficiently high to make white slavery profitable. This indicates that we have not

progressed as far toward the ideal of equality and respect for all people, as we would like to believe.

To buy and sell another human being, first requires a lack of respect for that individual as a person. It is this factor that makes the crime of slavery especially brutal. It requires the treatment of a person as though the individual were merely another animal. This mentality is a difficult one to grasp by people who consider themselves civilized. In spite of the cruelties of this crime, however, white slavery is a business and like all profit-making organizations, requires customers. There is still a lack of real knowledge concerning the motivation to indulge in vice by otherwise honest citizens. While that is beyond the scope of this paper, understanding the motivations of vice customers would be a prerequisite to understanding the crime of white slavery.

Finally, the problem that may well be contributing most to the inability to eliminate white slavery, is the issue raised at the beginning of this paper. The sheer lack of information on the topic, either in academic journals or investigative reports, is the largest obstacle to a solution. It actually appears that most people believe there is no problem regarding white slavery; that it is only a plot device of fiction writers. Until real light is shed upon this problem, there will be no solution.

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